

THE REFUTATION OF HIM [IBN TAYMIYYA]
WHO ATTRIBUTES DIRECTION TO ALLĀH
[Al-Raddu ‘alā Man Qāla Bil-Jiha]

IBN JAHBAL AL-KILĀBĪ

Translation and Notes by
Gibril Fouad Haddad

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Al-Raddu 'alā Man Qāla Bil-Jiha

Ibn Jahbal al-Kilābī
Introduction by Shaykh Wahbi Sulayman Ghawji
Translation and Notes by Gibril Fouad Haddad

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“Stay away from talk of limits and direction.”

Al-Muḥāsibī, *Risālat al-Mustarshidīn*.

“The Pre-Eternal One ﷻ does not have a ‘towards’ nor a limit. Nor is there any link between Him and creatures nor any separation from them. Being in a place, for Him, is an absurd impossibility. He was – Exalted is He – when there was no place, and He is now just as He ever was.”

Al-Qushayrī, *al-Mi‘rāj*.

“The sum total of our knowledge of Allāh ﷻ is certitude in His existence without modality and without place.”

Aḥmad al-Rifā‘ī, *Ḥikam*.

“The attribution of ‘highness’ to Allāh ﷻ refers to meaning. It is impossible that it refer to sensory perception.”

Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abū Dāwūd = his *Sunan*

Abū Nu‘aym = his *Ḥilya*

Aḥmad = his *Musnad*

Al-Bukhārī = his *Ṣaḥīḥ*

Al-Dāraquṭnī = his *Sunan*

Al-Dārimī = his *Musnad*, also known as the *Sunan*

Al-Ḥākim = his *Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*

Al-Haythamī = his *Majma‘ al-Zawā’id*

Ibn Abī Shayba = his *Muṣannaf*

Ibn ‘Asākir = his *Tārīkh Dimashq*

Ibn Ḥibbān = his *Ṣaḥīḥ*

Ibn Mājah = his *Sunan*

Muslim = his *Ṣaḥīḥ*

Al-Nasā’ī = his minor *Sunan* known as *al-Mujtabā*

Al-Tirmidhī = his *Sunan*

FOREWORD

BY SHAYKH MUHAMMAD AFIFI AL-AKITI

Like the Judaic and Christian theological traditions, the Islamic one also, – arguably with less crassness – faced the problems of scriptural literalism that result in an anthropomorphic theology. As the early (*salaf*) Muslim community became more sophisticated and began to lead the world in scientific progress – and especially from the time of Islam’s *Doctor Angelicus*, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) – Muslim theologians came to embrace and institutionalize the case for *ta’wīl*. This was Islām’s systematic solution of the problem, through a canon of figurative interpretation of scripture as a necessary tool of hermeneutics.

Not only did the method of *ta’wīl* keep anthropomorphism in check through offering a middle way in the understanding of Divine Attributes as limited by human language, but it served to reconcile Divine Scripture with the discoveries afforded by human reason. This legitimization of *ta’wīl* by the classical ‘*ulamā*’ and its systematic treatment in the Golden Age of Islām made it an established doctrine among Muslim theologians. It became the standard position in later (*khalaf*) orthodoxy within the Sunni tradition (alongside the formerly dominant, simpler alternative, and utterly unexplainable “non-method”: *tafwīd*) – the cultural milieu that brought forth this work.

This short theological tract, *Fī Nafī al-Jiha*, or *On Denying Direction to God*, by the Ash‘ari theologian and celebrated Shafi‘i jurist, Qāḍī Ibn Jahbal (d. 733/1333), is a clinical rebuttal of the controversial fatwā, the ‘*Aqīda Ḥamawiyya*, penned by his legendary contemporary, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). It is

considered, rightly, a classic manifesto of anti-literalism, which embraces the successful pro-*ta'wīl* Ghazālīan theses advocated centuries earlier – to the extent that Ibn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) reproduced the whole of Ibn Jahbal's work in his magisterial *Ṭabaqāt*.

The present volume is a special “all-Damascene” edition, which contains the very first (and definitive) English translation of Ibn Jahbal's Arabic text; completed by an authorized, nay Damascus-trained and native scholar, Shaykh Gibril Fouad Haddad, who possesses the complete and exclusively Dimashqī *ijāza* going back to the original Damascene author; and supplemented by superb scholarly documentation and a running commentary. The volume includes the *Muqaddima* of one of Damascus's senior living Ḥanafī jurists, Shaykh Wahbī Sulaymān Ghāwījī, which presents an up-to-date explanation of figurative interpretation in Islamic theology. The volume is also prefaced by another introduction, which catalogues the problematic positions of the redoubtable Ibn Taymiyya raised by scholars throughout the ages including his own students, regarding which a Dimashqī *muḥaddith* recently quipped: “The mistakes of the great are the greatest mistakes.”

This convenient *Collectio Errorum* by Shaykh Haddad is not a zero-sum critique. In fact, it will be appreciated for it isolates Ibn Taymiyya's unquestionably controversial materials from the rest of his vast corpus – thus enabling one to take the good and leave the bad; and this list will be a service to the non-scholar who might want to benefit from reading the works of this prolific Ḥanbalī jurist, one who is now enjoying a greater following and who indeed can be said to be a phenomenon of present-day Islām.

Along with a work by an earlier Ḥanbalī theologian, the *Dafʿ Shubah al-Tashbīh* of Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), this medieval contribution by Ibn Jahbal remains one of the most important texts refuting the anthropomorphists of the Muslim world. This will be an indispensable reference for advanced students of Islamic theology, other professional theologians, and modern academics needing primary source materials in English or a source book on the controversies surrounding Ibn Taymiyya's theology.

This same work embodies, moreover, a contemporary exercise in polemic representing the longstanding views in the conformist tradition of Muslim theology, whether via *taʾwīl* or *tafwīd*, and whether in the schools of the Ashʿarīs, Māturīdīs or Ḥanbalīs. In particular, it pits itself against one of the two opposite non-conformist readings of the Qurʾān and Sunna; and in general, it highlights the pitfalls of a literalistic mindset which plagues all scripturally-based religions.

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